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For Immediate Release
June 18, 2004

EIGHTH DEFENDANT PLEADS GUILTY
IN BRIBES-FOR-VISAS SCHEME

SACRAMENTO - U.S. Attorney McGregor W. Scott of the Eastern District of California and Assistant Attorney General Christopher A. Wray of the Criminal Division announced today that NAIRNDERJIT SINGH BHULLAR, 40, of Sacramento, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Sacramento to conspiring to defraud the United States, to bribe State Department officials, and to commit visa fraud. BHULLAR, who had operated as a "visa broker" in this scheme, was the eighth defendant to plead guilty in the case. He faces a maximum penalty of up to five years in prison, a three-year term of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000. Sentencing is scheduled for September 3, 2004.

The case is being prosecuted in U.S. District Court in Sacramento by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin B. Wagner, and S. Robert Tice-Raskin of the U.S. Attorney's Office, and Trial Attorney Noah D. Bookbinder of the Public Integrity Section, headed by Noel L. Hillman, Chief. It is the product of an extensive investigation conducted by the Diplomatic Security Service of the U.S. Department of State, and by agents with the FBI and several other state and federal agencies associated with the Joint Terrorism Task Force for the Eastern District of California, including the California Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Bureau of Immigration Control and Enforcement of the Department of Homeland Security. Sri Lankan law enforcement authorities also provided assistance in the investigation. The case was initially indicted on May 1, 2003, following an undercover investigation in Sri Lanka, surveillance and other investigation in Sacramento, Southern California and Northern Virginia.

A total of 11 defendants have been charged in the case. Two former State Department employees – LONG N. LEE, 52, a U.S. State Department Foreign Service Officer and career State Department employee, and her husband ACEY R. JOHNSON, who was a Consular Associate employed in the consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka – entered guilty pleas April 30, 2004. Previously, five visa broker defendants, brothers VINESH PRASAD, 33, and MINESH PRASAD, 28, of Sacramento, California; RAJWANT S. VIRK, 46, of Herndon, Virginia; RACHHPAL SINGH, 32, of Newark, California; and RAMESH K. JAISINGH, 57, of Fairfax, Virginia, entered guilty pleas. A jury trial for two defendants, KIM CHI LAM, of

Gardena, California, and PHUONG-HIEN LAM TRINH, 35, of Gardena, California, is scheduled for August 24, 2004. An eleventh defendant is a fugitive.

The defendants who have thus far pleaded guilty have admitted their involvement in a scheme in which JOHNSON and LEE took hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes between at least 2000 and 2003 in exchange for the issuance of visas to various foreign nationals, primarily from Vietnam and India. In his plea of guilty, BHULLAR admitted that, to procure visas for their clients illegally, he and other brokers referred foreign nationals to VINESH PRASAD, who passed identifying information to JOHNSON and LEE, who at that time were working at the United States Embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka. BHULLAR and VINESH PRASAD gave instructions to foreign nationals, their sponsors, or other brokers as to when and where the foreign nationals would need to go in Sri Lanka in order to receive a visa. The foreign nationals subsequently traveled to Sri Lanka. JOHNSON issued visas to these individuals while they were in Sri Lanka. The foreign nationals, or their sponsors, or other brokers then paid BHULLAR. BHULLAR retained a portion of the payment, and passed the rest to VINESH PRASAD, so it could be divided among PRASAD, LEE, and JOHNSON.

According to U.S. Attorney Scott, "In this era, it is vital to ensure integrity in the issuance of United States visas. These prosecutions underscore the importance the United States places on these matters."

The Department of Justice and the United States Attorney's Office noted that the indictment is only an accusation, and that the remaining defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

A copy of this press release is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/home>, select Press Releases.

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